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Montana Department of Commerce Supports Online Energy Degree Program at Tribal Colleges Through WIRED Grant

(HELENA) – The Montana Department of Commerce is supporting a new, online, energy technician degree program at the University of Montana College of Technology, in hopes the curriculum will be offered at Montana’s Tribal Colleges.

Commerce awarded the University of Montana a \$572,734 Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant for an online, distance education program to train energy technicians through the Missoula College of Technology. The program will be offered in partnership with several community colleges across Montana, and partnerships with Montana Tribal Colleges are also being pursued.

“Partnering this online, energy technology, degree program with the tribal colleges will open a world of educational and economic possibilities for Indian Country,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Our young people are the future of this state, and there’s no better stronghold for Montana’s innovative, energy revolution than in Indian Country.”

The two-year, Associate of Applied Science degree program will be offered through the Department of Applied Computing and Electronics at the UM College of Technology, starting in the fall of 2007. The curriculum will introduce students to traditional, emerging, renewable, and alternative energy technologies, and offer significant internship and networking opportunities.

“The Montana Department of Commerce wholeheartedly supports this program because of the potential it would have in Indian Country,” said Commerce Director Anthony Preite. “Education is the best investment for our economy, and this online program will provide educational and networking opportunities to countless students who are challenged by the vast and rural nature of our state.”

The program will be offered in partnership with Dawson Community College, Miles Community College, and Montana Tech of the UM College of Technology. The UM College of Technology is working closely with the Montana State University College of Technology to ensure its programs are complementary.

The WIRED program is focused on supporting projects that directly involve job training and job creation in bio-product business development across the 32 county WIRED region in eastern and central Montana and on Montana's six Indian reservations within the region.

The WIRED program has \$1.3 million available in 2007 for customized worker training for businesses working with universities, colleges, high schools, and other training providers on specialized bio-product training and curriculum development. The program will also provide grants for WIRED eligible job training programs or projects that will enhance and expand the bio-product industry in the WIRED region.

Montana's WIRED program was created as a result of Governor Brian Schweitzer's commitment to value added agricultural energy projects. In January 2006, the U.S. Department of Labor approved Governor Schweitzer's application for the WIRED initiative. Montana's application was one of only 13 approved nationwide.

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